

Sick Men of Europe

after so inauspicious a send-off, any hopes which may have been entertained that he would engage in remunerative political conversations were disappointed. Towards yet another explosion events were moving; and appeasement had for the time being to be held in suspense.

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After Austria, it was Czechoslovakia's turn to receive the propagandist barrage which preceded a Nazi attack. This composite State, set up by the Treaty of Versailles, had long been regarded as a model of sound administration and correct international behaviour. It was democratic, faithful to the League, chose professors for President, and had a close alliance with France; like a slum-settlement, stood out amid ramshackle surroundings as a little oasis of order and enlightenment. For strategic reasons, the Sudetenland and its German-speaking inhabitants, had been included in Czechoslovakia; and it was with these Germans that Hitler was for the moment concerned.

As the storm blew up, it was realised that, though England technically was under no obligation to go to Czechoslovakia's assistance, if France were involved, England would also be involved. The British Government was not in a position to disinterest itself in the situation which had arisen, and as a sympathetic and helpful gesture, decided to dispatch Lord Runciman to Prague. He was to consider himself, it was carefully explained, an unofficial 'investigator and mediator', and not in any sense an arbitrator.

As an investigator and mediator, he went; in his own words,

like one 'set adrift in a small boat in mid-Atlantic',³
investigating
much and mediating little, heard of here and
there, reported to
have brought about a more hopeful outlook,
reported not to
have made much progress, reported to be on his
way home, dis-
consolate. Various plans were devised for meeting
the Sudeten
Germans* grievances—Plan Number One, Two,
Three, Four,

⁸ See *Munich and the Dictators* by K. W. Seton-Watson.